



## **“Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered!”**

*Pope Francis, Kinshasa, 2 February 2023.*

We, churches and local communities in Africa, stand in solidarity with people who have lost their livelihoods, whose land rights have been violated, and whose soil and water have been polluted. As the climate crisis intensifies, we call on our Church and our institutions to side with the struggles of local communities over means of reproduction and habitable land, to restore their rights and to regenerate their land.

Climate actions which perpetuate injustice and amplify the exploitation of natural resources and displacement of communities must make way for equitable and just transition in agriculture, energy, and mining.

We stand in solidarity with all communities and territories affected by armed conflicts and resource wars, as in the regions of Cabo Delgado in Mozambique and the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

### **1. As the climate crisis intensifies, land and climate justice must go hand in hand.**

- We denounce any false solutions that deprive local communities of their livelihoods, land rights and forest tenure.
- Climate negotiations must deliver on community resilience, adaptation capacities and just solutions.
- Adaptation policies must become a priority for Climate Finance.
- Mitigation policies must lead to absolute emissions reductions through phasing out fossil fuel production and use (ICESCR 2022).
- We demand real zero, not net zero.

The world must rapidly shift away from burning fossil fuels - the number one cause of the climate crisis. Governments cannot allow new gas, coal, or oil projects if the world is to stay below the threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius in global warming. (IPCC Report, March 2023).

Development driven by fossil fuels tends to harm the environment and society. In the worst-case scenarios, it requires, in effect, the establishment of *sacrificial zones* and the designation of *sacrificial people* whose lives and land are forever changed by proximity to these projects.

For decades, activists have witnessed and fought against the abuses of the fossil fuel industry in Africa, documenting the violation of land rights and the health, environmental, social, and political costs Africans have incurred. These include the effects of routine oil spills in the Niger Delta and toxic gas flaring that sink people into poverty by destroying agricultural land and poisoning fishing waters. In Mozambique, the site of Africa's single largest foreign direct investment project, an offshore natural gas field is inciting violence and displacing people throughout the Cabo Delgado region. The gas is intended for export, not to expand energy access to the 70 percent of people living without electricity.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Uphold the Right to Say No! to large scale land acquisitions.

- The Right to Say No to environmentally destructive and socially unjust projects must be respected.
- The Right of Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous peoples, women, and their local communities to Say No to projects that deprive them of their land in their territories must be upheld at all times.
- Acknowledge the legitimacy of indigenous land rights.
- Strengthen the land rights of women.
- Improve accountability and transparency in land governance across the continent, as land is central to Africa's sustainable development agenda.
- Governments should incorporate the right to Free Prior and Informed Consent into domestic laws and develop effective follow-up implementation measures.

The value of land is so significant that many experts view it as a fundamental human right. This encompasses rights and responsibilities related to land, such as the right to adequate housing and a decent standard of living. The UN's committee on the rights of indigenous peoples emphasizes this by urging countries to prioritize discussions with indigenous communities and respect their cultural traditions, especially when planning major land development projects. For these communities, land isn't just a resource – it's a sacred space crucial to their identity and values. They believe that they are the best caretakers of their own land, reflecting the principle that they should have the Right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, rooted in their right to self-determination.

The "Right to Say No" emerged from community movements, particularly those affected by large-scale extractive industry projects. These projects often result in communities losing their homes, means of subsistence, and access to natural resources. Additionally, these communities face environmental degradation and harassment. Once the resources are depleted, corporations often leave, abandoning the devastation behind and leaving the host country in debt. Corruption is rampant in these industries, with corporations frequently bribing officials for project approvals. This is often more cost-effective for them than offering

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<sup>1</sup> [Africa's Fossil-Fuel Trap A Response to "The Divestment Delusion"](#), Nimmo Bassey and Anabela Lemos, in Foreign Affairs, 17 February 2022.

fair land compensation, paying decent wages, addressing health concerns, restoring damaged environments, or combating climate change impacts. (Source: Community Association Amadiba Crisis Committee, South Africa).

### **3. End corporate impunity and prevent land dispossession.**

- Uphold the obligation to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights.
- The UN Treaty, the Binding Legal Instrument, must provide for strong international laws regulating multinational companies, holding them accountable for human and land rights violations.
- Strong and effective mechanisms must provide communities with access to justice in case of adverse human rights impacts or social and environmental damage caused by private entities, public policies or investments by public development banks.
- Increased public accountability must translate into transparent land contracting.
- End financing large-scale land acquisitions by public development banks that violate Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

Preventive measures to avoid land dispossession should include the establishment of mechanisms for the protection of land tenure for populations in vulnerable situations; the coordination of humanitarian assistance and the implementation of international humanitarian law with measures to prevent land dispossession; the inclusion in information systems of all those estates at risk of dispossession, not only to prevent dispossession but also to facilitate future land restitution; and the possibility of freezing the land market in regions in which the risks of internal displacement and land dispossession are high. All such preventive measures should protect all forms of land tenure, including customary tenure, as those at higher risk of being dispossessed of their land may not be the formal owners of it. (ICSECR 20/1/2022, article 49).

Faced with suspicious deaths of journalists, land and human rights defenders, faith-based and civil society actors, citizens appeal to African institutions to enforce transparency and accountability mechanisms and punish corrupt governments. The African Peer Review Mechanism and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights must be pressured to do the work they were set up to do. (Cry Freedom, ZAM magazine).

### **4. Recognise agroecology as a solution to the climate crisis.**

- Agroecology must be recognized as a long-term mitigation and adaptation strategy and a viable structural model for agricultural and rural development.
- Support all proposals for laws and regulations and their application for securing community land to collectively develop agroecology.
- Direct climate finance to agroecology.
- Include commitments to agroecology in the Africa-EU climate negotiation towards COP28.

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- Put the obligation to respect, to protect and to fulfil the right to food, the right to land, and the right to a healthy environment upfront in the African-EU partnership.

Agroecology needs the support of national policies to secure access to land tenure for those whose legitimate user rights have not been recognized. Policies should avoid leading to land concentration or commodification of land. They should be aimed at improving the access of disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups and increasing their security of tenure. International cooperation and assistance can facilitate efforts to ensure that land policies are sustainable and are or will become an integral part of official land use planning and States' broader spatial planning. (ICESCR 2023).

The recent recognition by the UN of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is a powerful tool to address the human rights impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and ensure rights-based environmental action.<sup>2</sup>

The Kenyan Muranga County Government enacted an Agroecology Policy Act 2022-2032, encouraging agroecological farming practices and the production of organic products. The county is at the forefront of creating favourable legal frameworks to guide the implementation of agroecology practices that will help to adapt to climate change and enhance sustainable and resilient food systems.

### 5. Embrace a new vision for our common home and humanity.

- Embrace integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice.
- Respect and care for the community of life.
- Apply environmental ethics that consider the well-being of whole ecosystems in decision-making.
- Invite everybody to work together to respond to the ecological problems our communities face.
- Restrain human activities that harm the earth. Resist the everyday violence of living at the expense of others. Learn to limit our excessive consumption.

The culture of integral ecology counteracts the culture of extractivism that brings death to our people and our land. The *Laudato Si* concept of integral ecology invites our churches and communities to revisit our food culture, our eating and table habits, whether these are dinner tables, negotiating tables, or the Communion table, which Catholics understand to be the source of a fulfilled life. (Cardinal Ambongo, COP27).

The institutional Church and individual members play an important role in African civil society in the fight for social justice and the defence of human rights. The moral authority and public recognition afforded to Church officials can infuse existing land rights and climate justice campaigns with greater meaning and urgency while also providing a measure of protection to those who speak out. (East African Jesuit community, *Laudato Si*, 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> See [UNDP \(2023\) What is the right to a healthy environment?](#)